

## Attendance, Scheduling, and Assignments

Eaton found in high turnover homes that most involuntary terminations came from attendance issues. High turnover homes had strict and punitive responses to absences. Staff with personal needs affecting their attendance were often viewed with suspicion and met with punitive action.

**Spend Smarter:** A better way is to reward attendance, make adjustments, and provide help to good employees with problems, so people can come to work. Employees with good attendance want the poor attendance of co-workers addressed. No one wants to work short. However, a punitive approach may just lead to termination of a good employee. Adjustments, assistance, and rewards work better. Assess your current level of absences and its cost to your organization. Estimate what resources you can convert to support attendance. Make a realistic effort to improve attendance. As you make progress, you can take on a comprehensive approach for sustained good attendance. Basic elements of a comprehensive approach to sustained good attendance are:

### Clear, fair, and flexible attendance policies and practices

Attendance policies and practices will play a significant role in promoting good attendance. Policies need to be fair and flexible. They need to hold staff to a high standard and to provide assistance and adjustments so staff can meet that standard. Your attendance approach needs to reward good attendance rather than rewarding last minute assignments.

### Effective attendance policies and practices

- Accommodate requests for time off. When people need a day off, accommodate their need. Treat your staff like responsible adults. Understand that if people still need the day, they'll have to take it anyway. Then, instead of an absence you can plan for, you'll have an unscheduled absence that is harder to cover.
- Allow employees to switch days. Usual rules for coworker switching include limits on overtime, written documentation of the agreement, and holding the originally scheduled employee responsible for the substitute's attendance.
- Anticipate needs after stressful times. Sometimes, employees call out because they need a rest after working short, filling in for an absent staff member, or working a double shift. Instead of penalizing such absences, anticipate that the staff will need a break.
- If a staff member or their family is sick, ask if they expect the illness to continue for another day. Plan for the second day's absence ahead of time.
- Respect staff's reality. Have a specific number of absences trigger concerned intervention rather than triggering disciplinary action. Some homes have a "no-fault" policy. No reason is asked for and once the number of absences reaches a certain level, no reason is accepted. This policy may result in firing an employee even when their last absence was for a good reason. This has a negative impact on morale, and may not stand up in an unemployment hearing. Instead, find out why absences are occurring and see what can be done to help someone who is a good, caring staff person, be able to

have a schedule she can meet.

### **Hold staff to a high standard and provide assistance and adjustments where needed**

- Track attendance by employee, department, and shift using the call-in log.
- Report the employee's attendance record in with their paycheck. Show the number of absences in the pay-period and absences year to date. This tracking and reporting shows you are serious about attendance. It will make a difference for some employees when they know their attendance is being monitored.
- Offer help and make adjustments: Meet personally and confidentially with staff with absences. Explore the causes of absences and what can be done to help. Offer employee assistance and make adjustments to the schedule. Questions to ask:
  - Would a different schedule help?
  - Is the shift not working?
  - Are there some days that are harder than others?
  - Would the person do better with fewer hours on the schedule?
  - Does the employee need assistance with issues that are contributing to absences?

Most employees going through difficulties in their personal lives will, over time, even out and work regularly again. Adjusting a schedule or providing some help often makes a big difference. The resources to support attendance often pay for themselves in salvaging employment for good employees having hard times.

### **Enforce the rules**

Those who do not improve their attendance through these accommodations will be easy to identify. Take action with them to protect the stability of your daily schedule.

### **Have a sympathetic understanding of staff's problems**

Normal, everyday problems are compounded by low wages. Employees struggle to make ends meet, without much cushion to handle any problems related to illness, childcare, transportation, or even basic shelter. Homes that allow for and assist employees with their problems end up with employees who are better able to get to work, and who develop a deep commitment and loyalty to their employer. Yet in the field of long-term care the prevalent attitude is to "leave your problems at the door" as if employees can put problems totally aside. Instead, simply being able to take a moment to say what is happening often allows the employee to get into work mode.

One administrator said, *"We're dealing with their problems, because they're dealing with their problems. It's just a question of whether we deal with them up front or we force staff underground with what they are dealing with. When we force their issues underground, we wind up dealing with the problems in other ways, when they can't come to work, or are carrying their worries without any help or recognition from us as their employer. That's when we can lose a good worker who's having a bad time of it."*

## Ways to help

- Short-term loan programs: Many low-wage earners don't have access to short-term loans from banks for sudden expenses such as a costly car repair. Many homes have started to address this kind of need with in-house short-term loans. While there is currently no hard data on payback rates, the anecdotal evidence is that the payback rate is nearly 100%. Employees are grateful for the assistance and loyal to an employer that they can count on.
- Employee assistance programs (EAPs) offer a wide array of services, counseling, support, and referrals, and are a cost-effective investment. They have made a significant difference in attendance issues.
- Avoid micro-inequities: Think about the disparities that exist in your nursing home. When someone from the management team gets a call that her daughter is sick, she lets you know she needs to leave now to pick her up at school and take her home. You tell her you hope her daughter feels better and you'll see her tomorrow. A CNA gets the same call. Do you have the same response? In most nursing homes, the response is different. This is called a "micro-inequity". In the mind of the CNA, it's simply "unfair". They don't take their responsibilities lightly at work or as parents. Have equal trust in staff and allowance for family needs, regardless of an employee's position in the organization.
- Make accommodations: A simple example is rethinking the ban on cell phone use. Many evening staff who are parents want to know that their children are safely home from school, doing their homework, and finding out what's for dinner. One nurse manager adjusted the cell phone ban to make it clear that cell phones should not be used in a way that interferes with resident care. She invited staff to use her office to make their calls home to check on their children. One administrator put it like this: *"Many who work in long-term care have hard lives. I want this job to be a place of stability for them. I hope it can anchor life for them."*

## Reward reliability and good attendance instead of paying bonuses for last minute assignments

Many homes pay a significant hourly bonus to staff for taking a last minute assignment when there is an unscheduled or unexpected absence. Rewarding last minute assignments instead of rewarding attendance creates many problems.

- Employees who reliably come to work receive less pay than those who take the last minute assignment.
- Scheduled staff never knows whom they'll be working with or whether they'll be working short.
- Stress and the financial inequity can cause full-time staff to opt, over time, to become part time or per diem and then wait for the last minute call.
- Staff become more casual about their attendance, figuring that if they miss a shift, they can always pick up work later in the week, with a bonus.

**Spend Smarter:** A better way is to reward full-time work and good attendance by targeting resources to staff that commit to a regular schedule and have good attendance.

### **Reward guaranteed hours with better pay**

- Make full-time and guaranteed part-time hours a better financial deal than working per diem with bonuses for last minute assignments.
- Target substantial wage increases to people who guarantee hours so their pay rate is better than the hourly rate for per diem staff. Fund the wage increase by eliminating the last minute assignment bonus.
- Encourage per diem staff to convert to full-time status. Have one-on-one meetings with per diem staff that you want to convert. Explain to them that you are moving towards more full-time committed staff to create more stability and you want to offer them the option of coming on staff full-time.
- Spell out the financial advantages to them of converting to guaranteed hours.

### **Perfect attendance bonus**

- Give individual and team bonuses for those with perfect or the best attendance for a specified period of time.
- Effective time periods are short, because when the time period is too long, the attendance bonus can become irrelevant as soon as someone misses a day. Month by month or pay period by pay period are good timeframes.
- The bonus amount can be a lump sum payment (ex. \$25 per month), an addition to the hourly rate for the next pay period (ex. \$0.25 more per hour), a non-monetary reward such as a gas card or grocery card, or eligibility for a raffle with a substantial prize. Adding the payout to the base rate gives an employee a concrete incentive to maintain the higher level in their next paycheck. Gas cards or grocery cards are not taxable and also do not affect income levels for staff that rely on their eligibility for public benefits such as Medicaid or food stamps.
- Combine attendance and longevity incentives. Those who earn a bonus in any given time period can also be eligible for a cumulative or special bonus collectable at the end of the year. For example, for each month someone earns a perfect attendance bonus, they can also have a bonus amount banked for them and collectable in December.
- Paid time off: Offer an extra paid day off per quarter for those with no call-offs. Or pay out all or a portion of unused sick time at the end of the calendar year.
- Rules for eligibility: Rules should be fair, not punitive. The goal is to encourage attendance. Rules that are too strict or unfairly applied will cause resentment. Require staff to work every shift they are scheduled and to be on time. Do not disqualify staff for absences when they have a medical note and call in with ample time to get a replacement or make acceptable arrangements to switch with another employee,
- Team attendance bonuses: In addition to individual rewards, reward every member of the work group with the fewest shifts worked short in a given month or pay period. Team rewards help everyone pull together.

## Helpful hint to fairness in scheduling and in attendance bonuses

Fairness is crucial in scheduling and awarding attendance bonuses. If your staff experiences favoritism in scheduling, they'll resent attendance bonuses and view it as unfair. This happens if they are not accommodated when they need days off but other "favorite" staff are given their days off. If staff lose out on an attendance bonus that they would otherwise qualify for because of unfair scheduling practices a good incentive program is undermined.

One Home's path to a fair and flexible attendance policy:

Loren Salvietti, administrator at Quaboag-on-the Common in West Brookfield, Massachusetts, completely overhauled her attendance policies. She told her staff *"You are all adults. I trust that you are responsible. If you are unable to come to work, I know you must have a good reason. I'd like to work with you so you can attend to what you need to in your life and I can still be sure that we aren't counting on you on the schedule when you can't come in."*

Attendance problems were the leading cause of terminations. They often found that they were letting go of people who otherwise were very good employees. They decided to do something different. First, they called other administrators to see if anyone had a policy that was working for them. No one she talked to did so they put together a policy they thought would work. It was agreed upon to be a one-year to pilot after which they would evaluate their outcomes. The results were astounding. They reduced the terminations due to attendance from 40 in one year to 1 in the next year by shifting from a punitive policy to a constructive, helping, flexible policy. The daily attendance also improved significantly. After quietly using this policy for one year, they held open staff meetings to discuss the policy. In these meetings, which were held over a period of several days, at different times, so that all employees could attend, they introduced the policy and asked for staff reactions and input. The policy, modified to include staff input, was then formally put in place.

- Stable schedule and consistent assignments
- As attendance improves, put more stability into your schedule and assignments. Three key areas that will have a positive impact on attendance are:
  - Steady daily staffing rather than staff to census
  - Regular 8-hour shifts rather than long "Baylor" shifts
  - Consistent assignments
- Maintain steady daily staffing rather than staff to census. Employees depend on steady wages from scheduled workdays. Yet, it is a common practice to send CNAs home on shifts when the census is low. For many CNAs, losing a day of pay is a hardship that may drive them to leave for another job where they can count on their hours. Once employees realize they can't count on the schedule, they begin to see the schedule as something they can adjust from their end as well. Sending people home leads to people deciding at the last minute not to come in.

**Spend Smarter:** A better way is to maintain steady daily staffing. Steady staffing provides stable employment and earnings that staff can count on. Maintaining steady staffing during the ups and downs of census allows staff to have days with less stress. Employees appreciate those times for the way that

they can better tune into the care needs of their residents.

### **Helpful hint to manage the ups and downs of census**

- Anticipate when typical low census periods are. Look back at census data over the last year to see what patterns emerge. If it is clear that your census is low during certain times of the year, build this in to your budgeting and plan for it.
- Manage with stability in mind to maintain stability.

### **A cautionary tale: The price of staffing to census**

Because staffing to census is so prevalent in the field, this may be something you feel you have to do or that corporate is requiring you to do. That was the case for one nursing home administrator. She had worked hard to stabilize staffing and had cut her turnover by 50% over three years. When her corporate manager directed her to save money by staffing to census, she resisted, to no avail. Within three months of having instituted the practice of staffing to census, she began losing some long-time, loyal staff that told her they could no longer count on their jobs with her and they had to go elsewhere. They felt that their loyalty to her had not been returned.

The problem got worse. Staff began to look at the schedule, see that “too many staff” were scheduled given that the census was low, and decided on their own to call off rather than be sent home. Two or three scheduled staff members each doing this on a given shift left her short-staffed even though enough people had been scheduled.

Her savings of \$80 per shift were completely erased by the extra costs of replacing staff on shifts she was now short, and then replacing staff that had left for good. And some were irreplaceable. By showing her corporate manager the numbers, she convinced them to let her reverse the practice and return to steady staffing, but the damage had been done. She lost good staff, and worse, she lost the trust of some who remained. It took a long time to win that back.

### **Use regular 8 hour shifts rather than long Baylor shifts**

To meet the needs on hard-to-fill shifts such as weekends, evenings, or nights, many homes schedule employees to work long hours and be paid for more hours than they work. For example, work two 12-hour shifts and get paid for thirty hours, or work double doubles and get paid for forty hours. This is commonly referred to as a “Baylor” position. At times of overall staffing shortages, variations on Baylor positions have been offered during the regular weekday shifts as well. The downside to this practice is tremendous.

- One problem is exhaustion. Employees working such long hours are sleep deprived. This makes them vulnerable to errors and injuries, short-tempered, and unable to carry the same workload as those coming in fresh. Other staff may feel burdened working with these coworkers because it leaves them carrying more of the load and having potentially negative interactions. Employees can get hurt, residents can suffer, and coworkers can be disheartened.
- This arrangement creates a separation between weekday and weekend staff where weekend employees have little opportunity to interact with weekday staff. Working concentrated shifts

makes staff unavailable for regular communication, follow-through, and collaboration with the rest of the staff during the week. Weekend staff working long-shifts can be very task focused and not able or predisposed to look at the big picture in care of a given resident, supervision of staff, or initiatives that the nursing home may be undertaking.

- Baylor shifts pay staff for hours they do not work. Can you really afford to pay people to stay home?
- Paying staff for hours they do not work, and paying them to work past the point of exhaustion is not a long-term solution to staffing problems. Exhausted employees call out, generating replacement costs, or are difficult to work with, leading to turnover costs.

**Spend Smarter:** A better way is to pay better wages, with a substantial pay differential for hard-to-fill shifts. Limit the number of hours an employee can work in a row. Instead of paying people for hours they are not working, use those funds to pay better for the hours worked. Make sure that no schedule leaves staff isolated from the rest of the organization.

### **Helpful hint: An idea for weekend coverage**

Consider a Baylor shift of four, eight-hour days on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday that pays the equivalent of 40 hours for this 32-hour shift. It provides continuity and a tie in with regular weekday staff, and ensures a manageable work schedule for employees.

### **Have consistent assignments**

An assignment is consistent when CNAs care for the same residents every time that they work. Whenever an assignment change is built into the schedule, whether daily, weekly, monthly or quarterly, it is considered staff rotation. There is a mounting body of evidence that consistent assignment improves clinical, workforce, and organizational outcomes. Many consider it the foundation of quality improvement, culture change, and workforce retention. Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes has made consistent assignment one of nine areas participating nursing homes are asked to work toward during the campaign.

### **Reasons for consistent assignment**

- Consistent assignments build relationships between residents and staff.
- Attendance is better and turnover is reduced. Caregivers report feeling a greater sense of responsibility at work because they know best what "their" residents need.
- Family members feel more comfortable with the care when they know the caregiver.
- Teamwork improves. When CNAs work consistently with the same residents, they also have the same coworkers and teamwork develops.
- Quality of care improves when CNAs care for the same residents consistently. They are able to notice subtle changes in a resident's individual needs, conditions, and characteristics. Staff familiar with residents know better how to help them and are more accountable for care outcomes.

### **But I'm only brushing your teeth**

Anna Ortigara, the author of the LEAP leadership training program for nurses, developed an exercise for corporate nursing home leaders participating in the CMS pilot *Improving the Nursing Home Culture*. Participants paired up. They were given a toothbrush, toothpaste, a bib, a glass of water, and a spit cup. One person in the pair brushed the other's teeth. If you're cringing at the thought of this, you should know that it wasn't easy for the participants either. But they realized that even this is not the most intimate care nursing home residents receive.

After the exercise, they discussed what it is like to receive personal care. They thought about the difference between receiving such care as a task from a staff member with whom they have no attachment compared to receiving such care in the context of a warm relationship and strong connection.

At the end of the pilot, as they reviewed turning points, this was one. And the move to consistent assignment turned out to be a key factor in their success in reducing turnover.

### **A positive chain of leadership**

Good leaders bring out the best in others. Eaton noted that low turnover homes support and develop leaders at every level of the organization. She saw strong leaders among supervisors, managers, and peers, which she called "a positive chain of leadership." This positive chain of leadership builds on staff's "intrinsic motivation" — what most people who work in long-term care describe as a "calling" to care for others. This "intrinsic motivation" drives people to overcome the difficulties and stresses of the work to take care of the residents they know are depending on them. When you manage in a way that encourages and supports this motivation, employees do their best.

Yet the long-term care field has historically had a top down, punitive approach to management that dampens staff's intrinsic motivation. Many managers and supervisors have not had training in supervision, and follow the rule-oriented, punitive approach they see around them. Employees experience the punitive, "command and control" approach as disrespect. Many cite it as a reason they leave a job or the field. It certainly does not bring out the best in staff. A better way is to establish a positive chain of leadership in your organization:

- Expect the best from staff and help them do their best
- Develop and support leadership skills among supervisors and managers
- Have regular workforce-workflow meetings with supervisors and managers
- Have regular systems to promote teamwork, communication, and collaborative problem-solving
- Develop and support front-line staff in exercising good independent judgment

### **Expect the best and help people perform at their best**

Expect people to perform at their best and help them get there. Most people step up into their own personal best when they know that there is an expectation of high standards. It is hardwired into our human nature to want to excel. By having high expectations we are tapping into a basic human desire for mastery. When management believes staff wants to do a good job and provides support, this generates an environment of mutual support. In *Encouraging the Heart*, Kouzes and Posner outline steps for bringing out the best in staff:

- Set clear standards – people need to know what’s expected of them
- Expect the best – it will be a self-fulfilling prophecy
- Pay attention – tune into people individually
- Personalize recognition – group appreciation is good; specific individual acknowledgement is better
- Tell your story – share successes; this is a way of teaching what you’re aiming for and acknowledging when you achieve it
- Celebrate together – have fun; spend at least as much time acknowledging what’s gone well as is spent correcting what hasn’t
- Set the example – leaders go first; staff learn far more by what you do than what you say

The basis of good management and supervision is good mentoring relationships. Identify what your employees need in order to meet high expectations and help them develop their own potential. Tune into people individually – recognize what they are capable of and what they need to succeed. You will help your managers and supervisors perform better and role model a way for them to approach the people they supervise. This becomes a positive chain of leadership.

### People development

Good managers develop others. For supervisors to lead well, management needs to spend time developing supervisors’ leadership skills. Do this through individual coaching and group meetings with supervisors about workforce issues. Actively involve managers in supporting their supervisors.

Leadership is a skill to be developed. Assess your managers and supervisors individually and determine how to help them be their best. Have high expectations. Help supervisors and managers take on challenges and grow.

Help your managers and supervisors develop trust in their own decision-making abilities. When supervisors come to you with a decision, use this as an opportunity to help them develop. If a staff member comes to top management to intercede in situations where they don’t have trust in how their direct supervisor is handling the situation, use this also as an opportunity to develop the supervisor.

- Help the supervisor think through how to approach the situation and follow-up with them on what happened. At first, tell them how you are thinking about it, what you see as options and the advantages and pitfalls of each option. Spell out your thinking about the situation and why you think the way you do. Ask them how they are seeing it.
- Over time, ask them what they see as the options instead being the first to share how you see the situation and what options you see. Ask what they see as advantages and disadvantages to each. Talk together about how each option would play out. Teach them how to think options through the way you do. This is the skill of executive decision-making.
- Spell out the permissions and parameters of their decision-making. Don’t leave them frustrated because they put effort into something that you’re not comfortable having them do.
- As they get more comfortable in taking on decision-making, you will also have more confidence in the decisions they are making and be able to support them. If you have concerns about their thought process, spell the concerns out.

- Eventually they will come to you just to let you know what was done in a given situation. You will feel comfortable because the line of thinking that went into it is one that you had a hand in developing.
- Let people know that you are there to support them, and that you are not leaving them out on a limb.
- Follow-up with them, and teach them how to follow-up. Many decisions need continued maintenance or occasional adjustments. This kind of follow-up is another skill for effective management. It may be easier to do it yourself, but it is better in the long run to help your employees develop this ability.

### **Workflow/workforce meetings with charge nurses**

You probably spend far more time than you'd like on people problems. Be proactive about your people management and you'll easily cut that time in half. Develop your supervisors' leadership skills by having regular meetings about workforce and workflow issues. Spend time proactively on these issues and develop your staffs' skills in problem-solving together.

At one workflow meeting, the Director of Nursing learned that the pharmacy delivered the meds at 10:45 p.m. every night, just as the evening supervisor was trying to finish things up to go home. Instead of being able to put everything in order and have a good report with the night supervisor, she had to check and distribute all the meds. It was fairly simple to tell the pharmacy to get the meds there by 9:00 p.m.

### **Regular systems for teamwork, communication, and problem solving**

Systems that support regular communication provide the structure for teamwork and contribute to stability both in the day-to-day and in the overall work environment. Bring people together both on an organizational level and at the unit level to ensure that, everyday, people have the information they need, when they need it. Having information about individual residents, new admissions, events in the building, or other matters relevant to care, actually saves staff time. Regular ways of putting heads together for joint problem solving can save time and improve how people work together.

During times of staffing challenges, organizations often see time spent in meetings as a luxury that can no longer be afforded. Staff meetings where issues can be talked through are postponed or cancelled. Administration may fear that meetings will be "gripe" session instead of being productive. Staff have no way of learning what is being done to alleviate the situation, and nowhere to voice concerns, identify problems, or engage together in productive problem-solving. In the absence of real information and communication, staff perceive that management is either unaware or unconcerned about the problems they face.

A better way is to bring everyone together and open lines of communication. Bringing everyone together to figure out how to work together to get everything done is even more necessary. It lets staff know what efforts are underway and it gives management valuable information from staff about where the trouble spots are that need to be kept in mind. If it has been the home's practice to bring people

together, that should continue in hard times. And if it hasn't been the practice, hard times create additional need for meetings.

### **Good simple communication systems: Here are some good systems for supporting communication that do not take a lot of time but give people needed information**

- Quick, change-of-shift meetings with outgoing and incoming staff are an important way to support stability and a smooth hand-off.
- Start of shift stand-up meetings get everyone on the same page together about their responsibilities for the day, let people know the situation, and what's expected of them. You can hear from staff and get them working together. Going around individually to staff is also good, but having them all together reinforces teamwork.
- Mid-shift huddles refocus staff on what is needed on their shift and provides a check-in on how everything is going. Find out if anyone is behind and needs more help and get staff to put their heads together on how to help out. This is especially a good practice if you are working short-handed. It's also useful if you have younger staff.
- A tip about younger staff relates to brain development. The executive function in the brain does not fully develop until people are in their mid to late 20s. Before executive function develops, young adults do not have as much brain ability to see ahead and organize their time. They need regular structured guidance at intervals throughout their shift to complete their responsibilities.
- End of shift check in. Ask how'd the day go? Give people a pat on the back for a job well done. Find out what issues need to be passed to the oncoming shift.
- A quick on-the-spot huddle is a good way to problem solve together when an issue comes up. Anyone can call a huddle and everyone then comes together. If you have fewer people than expected at work, have a quick huddle to figure out how you'll work together, who should do what to cover. If you have a new admission, quickly huddle to free up the staff person who'll be caring for the new resident. If you have some contention among staff, quickly huddle to resolve it. If a resident is having difficulties, quickly huddle to get ideas on how to handle the situation. The huddle helps staff work as a team, and draws on their ideas and problem-solving skills. When the solution is theirs, they'll have more faith in it and more energy to make it work.
- Daily or weekly team meetings are useful in every department for updates, check-ins, and problem solving. Include housekeeping, activities, and others assigned to your neighborhood in your meeting.
- Hold quarterly staff meetings in a way that everyone can attend. Ideally they should be held at several points in the day so that everyone can come and you can still staff the floor. Good times for one-hour meetings are 7:15 a.m., 1:45 p.m., and 3:15 p.m. so that people can come just after or just before their shift.
- Workforce and workflow meetings with charge nurses should look at issues such as how new employees are doing, how contention is being resolved, how to address a clinical matter being missed – such as getting in all the weights, or how to help out on a unit that is working short.
- Managing by walking around: Top administrative staff routinely walk through the building during the day, and especially during stressful times, to be available, see what is going on, lend a hand, and voice appreciation.

### **Managing by walking around – Rounds for retention**

Make it a daily routine to walk through the building in slow, lingering rounds for retention. This kind of walk through is not to be confused with micromanaging. Micromanaging is checking up on people and walking around to see what is being done wrong. Forget the clipboard – this is very different. It is a way of supporting people, by being closely in touch with what they need.

Set a positive tone for the day. Be available, visible, and in touch with staff. By this conscientious act of being out and about and greeting staff personally, you generate warmth and positive energy.

Hear and see what people need to do their jobs, how new employees are faring, and where the trouble spots are that need attention and assistance. A daily early morning walk around actually saves time later in the day because you are aware of the needs early enough in the day to do something about them rather than being caught off guard by a situation when you finally hear about it much later. When you hear concerns, it is essential to do what you say you will do, and to follow-up with the people involved. Sometimes you take action but don't tell the staff what you've done and then they don't know that their conversation with you mattered.

Catch your staff doing the right things. In a walk through later in the day engage staff in conversation about what has gone well today. This is not to be done to suppress concerns but to know who deserves a pat on the back. After you hear what's gone well, give the pat on the back and spread the good will. *For instance, if you ask a charge nurse what has gone well and she tells you the meals went out smoothly and the residents enjoyed the lasagna, then when you are in the kitchen area, you can tell the staff there that you were just on unit two, and Sue, the nurse said that everything went smoothly today and that the residents loved the lasagna—good job!*

This builds relationships among the staff, and creates an environment where people feel appreciated, by you and by their coworkers. Telling food service staff that the compliment came from nursing builds good will between two work areas.

### **Encouragement and feedback**

In *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner tell a story about an army experiment. Participants in a special training program had gone through a rigorous few weeks that were to culminate in a long march. On the day of the march the soldiers were divided into four groups.

- The first group was told exactly how long they had to march – 20 kilometers – and were given regular progress reports along the way.
- The second group was told, “This is the long march you heard about.” Nobody knew how far they would march, nor were they informed of their progress along the way.
- The third group was told they would march 15 kilometers. When they got to 14 kilometers, they were told they really had to march 6 more, to 20.
- The fourth group was told they had to march 25 kilometers. At 14, they were told they would only march 20, and that they only had 6 more to go.

So how did each group do? It's no surprise that the first group did the best. They finished first. Blood tests for stress indicators were taken during the march and again 24-hours later. The first group scored better in their stress indicators as well.

Group three came in second. Apparently having to rise to the occasion brings out good performance in people. Group four came in third, having let down when they heard they were almost done.

It's also no surprise that group two came in last. They had no information to go on, and no feedback along the way. They were left in the dark and their performance reflected it. These soldiers were all in comparable shape with comparable ability. How they were encouraged by regular feedback made the difference in their performance.

Ongoing regular ways of letting people know what's expected of them and how they are doing to meet those expectations makes a big difference in performance. If leaders provide a clear sense of direction and provide feedback along the way, they encourage people to reach inside and do their best. *See communication systems section for opportunities to give encouragement, feedback, and appreciation.*

### **Simple ways to give encouragement, appreciation, and feedback include:**

- Thank you notes: Ken Blanchard in the *One Minute Manager* says effective praise is timely, specific, sincere, proportional, and positive. Never follow a thank you with a "but".
- Brag boards and other visible ways of acknowledging good performance or showing progress in a particular area of focus.
- Merit-grams that can be given by anyone to anyone so staff can thank each other. Tie the merit-grams to gift cards for gas, groceries, movies, or a prize.
- Pats on the back while managing by walking around.
- Special mentions of accomplishments in start of shift stand-ups, staff meetings, and manager meetings.

Consider both group rewards and individual rewards. Individual rewards are extremely important. People need to know that you see what they are doing and appreciate it. Group rewards provide the extra benefit of helping teamwork and cohesiveness flourish. For example, reward the unit that has the best attendance or a work team that retains a new coworker.

Recognition and appreciation are the icing on the cake, not the cake. When staff are working well together every day and feel good about their jobs the appreciations are real celebrations. Appreciations and celebrations that are an extension of positive relationships are enjoyable for everyone. Supervisors who are hands-on and involved interact regularly with staff and give appreciation as part of their daily interaction. In homes where the regular contact is not good and staff are not getting along well with each other, signs of appreciation such as a pizza party or an employee recognition event will not make up for the negative feelings. Difficulties of the working situation will overshadow staff's ability to receive the appreciative gesture being offered.

Many managers feel personally stung when their gesture of thankfulness in the form of a pizza party is not appreciated. While the gesture may have been truly a heartfelt way of showing gratitude, when staff

feel the continued stress of working short, or are working doubles, or there is a harshness in interactions on the floor, a pizza party may not be able to overcome those negative feelings. It may be better received if it is not done as a party, but as a gesture of helping them get through long hours with an acknowledgement that it is known that they did not plan on working this many hours and need nourishment. For this type of appreciation to work it has to happen when people see it as a genuine gesture of thankfulness. It will fall short if it is perfunctory and not heartfelt or if the negatives on the floor are overwhelming.

### **Independent judgment and decision-making**

As homes begin to reexamine long-standing practices, you'll need to have staff fully engaged in the process. You need staff's questions, concerns, and ability to help think through new and better approaches to care. Yet, employees are discouraged from using critical thinking. Today's nursing homes are highly structured with policies and procedures for every situation. Often a blanket approach designed to protect the organization is not necessarily the best approach for an individual resident. Employees then have to enforce policies they know aren't working with little avenue for raising a concern, let alone resolving it.

A better way is to support staff's independent judgment, critical thinking, and decision-making through a developmental process. It is important that both you and the staff feel confident in decision-making.

- Regular ways of communicating get staff used to meeting together and talking things through. Use start of shift stand-up, mid-shift huddles, and end of shift check-ins to talk over any issues and involve staff in problem solving together.
- When staff bring issues to you, ask their thoughts and talk through the options and issues to be weighed so they learn how you're thinking about it and develop their own critical thinking skills.
- When issues need to be addressed take staff through a problem-solving process. Have staff identify why it's important. Then have them talk about what's working now, what's not, barriers, and options. Be sure to lay out any regulations and other requirements to be considered.
- Let staff make decisions with proper guidance, support, and oversight.

The foundation of good leadership is leading by example and modeling the way. Employees respond more to what they see you do than what they hear you say. If you say that residents come first, but you walk by a call bell without answering it, you are modeling that whatever else you are doing comes before whatever the resident needed. Once you are modeling good leadership, the next step is to mentor your staff. Let them feel your support and your belief in them. Help them shine. Then whatever they hear from you, whatever you teach, will just be a confirmation of the rest. This is the model for a good positive chain of leadership. This will provide a stable environment and the base for high performance.